DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 068 IR 021 506

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TITLE	A Study on Describing the Field Identity of Educational Communications in Turkey.
PUB DATE	2001-11-00
NOTE	7p.; In: Annual Proceedings of Selected Research and Development [and] Practice Papers Presented at the National Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (24th, Atlanta, GA, November 8-12, 2001). Volumes 1-2; see IR 021 504.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication (Thought Transfer); Computer Mediated Communication; Data Analysis; *Educational Practices; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; School Surveys; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS	Turkey

ABSTRACT

Although educational communications has been accepted as an independent field of study for nearly 40 years, there still is not agreement on its conceptual definition and boundaries in Turkey. This study was conducted by using the literature and the experts' opinions to describe the field identity of educational communications. The researchers contributing to theoretical development of the field and practitioners developing products of educational communications in Turkey were selected to form the expert panel. Then, a three-stage Delphi technique was used to collect opinions of experts who have been geographically dispersed and difficult to bring together. Data about the experts' opinions on both the different aspects of educational communications and the structure of the questionnaire were collected. The study showed that opinions of the researchers and practitioners on these competencies, issues, and trends are similar except the "describing and introducing the field" category, and a few of the items. In the further analysis of the data, 16 professional competencies, 10 current issues, and 19 future trends were identified. (Contains 12 references.) (Author/AEF)

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A Study on Describing the Field Identity of Educational Communications in Turkey

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Abstract

Although educational communications has been accepted as an independent field of study for nearly 40 years, there is still no agreement on its conceptual definition and boundaries in Turkey.

This study was conducted by using the literature, and the experts' opinions to describe the field identity of educational communications. The researchers contributing to theoretical development of the field and practitioners developing products of educational communications in Turkey were selected to form the expert panel. Then, a three-stage Delphi technique was used to collect opinions of experts who have been geographically dispersed and hard to bring together. Data about the experts' opinions on both the different aspects of educational communications and the structure of the questionnaire were collected.

The study has shown that opinions of the researchers and practitioners on these competencies, issues, and trends are similar except the "describing and introducing the field" category, and a few of the items. In the further analysis of the data, 16 professional competencies, 10 current issues, and 19 future trends were identified.

Introduction

The term "educational communications" is used to refer a field of study derived from the efforts of solving problems and needs of human beings about learning through developing technologies by using theories and principles of many other fields. In other words, educational communications is another name for the field of educational technology. Due to long history of educational television, the term "educational communications" has been used instead of educational technology for years. Thus, educational communications is used through out this paper.

Although educational communications has been accepted as an independent field of study for more than 40 years, there have always been many discussions and disagreements on its conceptual definition and boundaries (Hackbarth, 1996; Heinick, 1984). According to Seattler (1990) it looks like these conflicts will always be.

This situation causes difficulties for introducing the field to people working in other fields as well as new comers. It also grounds problems in coordination between research and practice in the field. These problems are experienced more intensely in Turkey because of diverse interpretations of the field.

However, in order to improve and extend the acceptance as a mature field of study, these sorts of problems must be overcome. By overcoming these sorts of problems in a field, theoretical supports might be provided to the practices, instructional programs and research studies might be directed, people working in the field might improve themselves, decisions that might be effective future directions of the field can be supported, and the field might be introduced to the others and new comers (Marriner, 1989).

Unfortunately there is almost no or a few study on either describing the field identity of educational communications or establishing a consensus on the definition and boundaries of the field. The first and one of the significant works was Alkan's philosophical thoughts about use of technology in education, which was completed in 1977. Since this work several significant works such as Çilenti (1983), Güler (1990), Barkan (1994) have also done. But all of them are based on translations and interpretations of foreign researchers' works and represent their personal views. So that, almost all define the field where they stand from and this situation cause conflicting problems.

In addition, multitude of variables influencing the field and mobile nature of the field make harder to come a consensus on different aspects of the field, too.

Another important reasons of having no agreement on the aspects of the field might be that there are very few people work directly educational communications. Most of these people are separated geographically and hard to bring them together.

Delphi technique is one of the useful applications for group decision-making without face-to-face interaction. The major idea beneath this technique is that "more heads are better than one". Delphi technique is described as "... an anonymous, independent, noncompetitive survey of experts to obtain consensus without necessarily involving group meetings. The technique essentially entails a series of surveys using the same experts, each survey dependent upon the responses of the previous one" (Jonassen, Hannum, & Tessmer, 1989). Although its several limitations, Delphi technique has been used for many years for especially group decision-making and future predictions.

Statement of Purpose

This study purposes to determine different aspects of educational communications such as theoretical backgrounds, research topics, emphasis areas, roles and competencies, major issues and problems, future direction; therefore, it was intended to clarify the field identity of educational communications. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

What kinds of phenomena have been effective on evolution of the field?

What are the emphasis areas and research topics in the field?

What are the competencies of experts of educational communications?

What are the major problems, issues and future directions in the field?

Method

Since this study requires group decision-making and future predictions, Delphi technique has been chosen for especially judgmental data collection. In addition to Delphi, theoretical works and research studies of foreign experts are also used for particularly phenomenal data collection.

Participants

This investigation was conducted with two experts groups. We hoped that our results would be of interest to academicians who either conducted research or published a distinguished work (paper, book, etc.) to contribute the body of scientific knowledge in educational communications and corporate trainers who are experts work in either a private or public sector organization and design, develop, evaluate, manage instructional activities.

It was intended to reach out the whole population since there are a few people working in the field. Fifty (5) participants involved in Phase 1, but only thirty (30) of them managed to complete Phase 3. Half of these participants were researchers (all academicians) and others were practitioners (all corporate trainers). Most of the participants who dropped the investigation were practitioners.

Instrument and Treatment

The Delphi instrument unfolded in three phases. Phase 1 consisted of an introductory letter and a request for participants to assist in offering the aspects of the field we're for investigating. In addition to these instruments conversations were conducted mostly through telephone calls. Submitted statements were compiled, analyzed to identify the aspects of educational communications for investigating. As a result of this phase 10 aspects were identified among the offered ones: History, definition, theoretical foundations, research topics, emphasis areas, experts' roles and competencies, instructional programs, major issues and problems, future trends and directions, process of educational communications.

After having conducted a literature review, we determined 143 statements and developed a Likert type questionnaire including these statements for Phase 2. In Phase 2 of the study, this questionnaire was sent to each respondent of Phase 1, it was asked each person to rate each of the 143 statements as to how strongly they anticipated the statement. In the Likert type questionnaire the Endpoint 1 was to indicate that the participants strongly disagree the statement, and Endpoint 5 to indicate that the participants strongly agree the statement. Also it was provided to indicate their thoughts on the overall structure of the questionnaire.

After reaching expected return rate (17 for each group), we analyzed the data and concluded that most of these statements were phenomenal data and required no further investigation. In other words, the participants indicated that these must be accepted as they are so that they must not be included into the questionnaire. These statements were excluded from the questionnaire owing to the consistency with the literature. As a result this Phase, 143 discrete statements was reduced to 70 and these were categorized into three groups: competencies, problems, and trends.

In Phase 3, the last version of the questionnaire sent to the determined participants of Phase 1. Unfortunately the ones did not respond the Phase 1 and Phase 2 repeated their attitudes about responding even though we reach most of them through phone and requested to respond. After receiving 15 responds for each group, the data analyzed.

Through this three-phased Delphi study both a new standard questionnaire developed and experts' viewpoints were integrated.

Results

In Phase 3, we calculated the mean score on all items to be 3.87, with a standard deviation of .43. These and frequency of scores, in general terms, indicate that the average score on the 70 items leaned toward an agreement –but not a strong one- side of the scale. Also it can be observed that there is not a big variation among all participants' responses. When the two groups of researchers and practitioners were compared, it was found that the researchers were not only more agreed on the statements than practitioners (mean scores of 4.0 versus 3.73) but they also show a few variations in their responses as shown by the decrease in standard deviation (.028 versus 0.52) (Table 1).

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation of Groups

Groups	Item Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Researchers	4.00	0.28
Practitioners	3.73	0.52
Total	3.87	0.43

The analysis of the results revealed that participants rated 38 of 70 items with mean scores higher than 3.87. This finding might be interpreted as that there is a strong agreement on these statements related to the field.

It was also compared the items rated by the researchers with those rated by the practitioners. An analysis by t test of non-independent items yielded a statistically significant difference on 11 of the 70 items between the two groups at or below an alpha level of .05. Except one of the item, related to the trend about decrease in research studies, in all other cases, researchers rated the items to be more agreed than practitioners.

Discussions

The results reached in this investigation are given below into four groups according to the research questions.

Phenomena Influence the Evolution of the Field

This part heavily depends on phenomenal data collected from literature. The literature review shown that the term "educational communications" refer to a field of study derived from the efforts of solving problems and needs of human beings about learning through developing technologies by using theories and principles of many other fields. The roots of the field can be traced back to the works of Comenius. Educational communications was considered as a movement until the mid 1960s and then it has accepted as a field of scientific study. During the period of being considered as a movement, it was focused on the effective presentations of the content with an instructor and the audio-visual aids. During 1950s, with the influences of communication, system and particularly learning theories, the focus shifted on development of instructional materials and transferring learning theories into instructional activities. The previous focus rooted the educational media emphasis area and latter leaded the development of instructional design models and theories (Ely, 1996).

Most of the current practices and research studies are related to the instructional design. The results of Delphi show that the highest means scores observed on statements related to instructional design. In this context, it might be claimed that the investigation supports the idea that instructional design has a significant role in educational communications.

On the other hand, literature reveals that with the influence of constructivist approach, most of the educational communication efforts changed toward design or organization of learning environments where learners learn through interacting with authentic contexts (Winn & Snyder, 1996). During the Delphi investigations all participants agreed on the items related to this issue; therefore, this can be considered as an indicator of support of this study to the literature.

Emphasis Areas and Research

This part also depends on phenomenal data collected from literature. Research studies show us the topics that educational communication specialists are dealing with (Thompson, Simonson & Hargrave, 1996). Some of the variables are motivation, transfer, learning context, feedback, learning strategies, learning styles, attention focusing, confidence, time-on-task, retention. Experts use these sorts of variables to design effective, efficient, and appealing learning environments. This also supports the definition of educational communications, which refer to a field of study derived from the efforts of solving problems and needs of human beings about learning through developing technologies by using theories and principles of many other fields.

On the other hand, there are so many emphasis areas in the field. But, this might display the field too broad and unorganized, and might make harder to clarify the theoretical boundaries of the field. In order to eliminate these dangers, provide leadership for the studies, and make the introduction of the field easier, there might be a need for categorizing the emphasis areas.

Thus, we categorized all areas into three major emphasis areas after having examined the research studies, practices, developments and trends of the field. These are (a) instructional design, (b) educational media, and (c) human resources development. The items included in the questionnaire are falling into one of these areas. This situation supports this categorization of emphasis areas.

Competencies

There are several sources about the competencies of educational communication specialists in the literature. By using these sources and views of experts 31 competencies were determined. However after having a detailed investigation, we have decided to combine related ones so that we could manage to lessen the number of competencies. As a result of these efforts, 16 major competencies for educational communication specialist were concluded on. These competencies have shown similarity with the competencies determined for instructional designer by AECT and NSPI Task Force. These are:

- Analyze the needs
- Determine the projects appropriate for instructional design
- Describe the learner characteristics
- Analyze the characteristics of organizational environment
- Conduct task/content/job analysis
- Write performance objectives
- Develop achievement tests
- Sequence the objectives
- Select the instructional strategy
- Design the educational media
- Evaluate the outputs of education, instruction and training

- Design the management systems of learning
- Communicate verbally, visually and aurally
- Consult for the individual and career development
- Plan and monitor his/her own development
- Introduce educational communication field to the other and extend its applications

On the other hand, although instructional design is a well known and highly accepted emphasis area of educational communications all over the World, there are very few people have shown interest and worked in the this field in Turkey. Having no Turkish books on instructional design can also show how Turkish scholars pay attention to this area. However the Higher Education Council required an instructional design course for all the Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology undergraduate programs of education colleges but contents of most of these courses are far from instructional design and usually more related to the theories of teaching and learning. Only in Educational Communications and Planning Department of Anadolu University, several courses in varying levels (graduate, undergraduate) related to the instructional design such as "Introduction to Instructional Design, Instructional Design Models and Theories, Needs Assessment, Instructional Media Design have been offered since 1994. It is our hope that there will be more promising efforts to show the power and the importance of instructional design.

Major Problems and Future Directions

Based on the data collected form participants and the literature, 16 major problems identified and included the last version of the questionnaire. However, the results exposed that there is an agreement on only 6 of 16 items.

Among these 6 problems, the one related to the separation of evaluation as an individual field apart from the educational communications is interesting. It can be noticed in the literature that evaluation has been taken as a separate field of study for years but there is a tendency that claims that evaluation is one of the main parts of instructional design and cannot be regarded separate from this process. Results of the questionnaire demonstrate that there is a significant difference on this item between the groups. Researchers strongly believe in such a problem while practitioners are not sure about the existence of this problem. We interpret this as practitioners show more enthusiasm and pay more attention on evaluation today than they did in the past.

The item related to the research in the field is also interesting one. This item includes the idea that the attention in the field focuses much more on practice than research. Literature reveals the existence of such a problem (Gentry & Csete, 1991). However, the results of the questionnaire indicate that this is not a true statement anymore (mean score of 2.77). In other words the participants do not agree with this statement. Though there is a strong disagreement on this item between the groups. For only this item researchers did not supported the statement more strongly than practitioners (means scores of 2.40 versus 3.13). We interpreted this as an increase in research studies conducted during the recent years and because of this researchers believe that they do conduct more research now compare to they did in the past. In addition, parishioners are not able to follow these studies as good as researchers.

Another problem uncovered through this investigation is that an uncertainty about the theoretical boundaries of the field is still continuing. The main reason of this problem is the lack of enough research or other studies on this topic. Also having no professional organization and publication about the field of educational communications in Turkey supports this problem. The field usually is perceived as a field of study deals with bringing new technological tools into education. Because of this narrow view investments generally go to the production of new tools. The wide spread structure of the descriptive studies related to the field also supports the problem. This problem causes the diverse structure of instructional programs, misconceptions about the field and its place in the society, lack of relationship with other fields.

We concluded that the main reason under beneath most of these problems is lack of clarification of scope of the field. This main problem creates more problems. Also literature is full of same ideas on this problem (e.g. Gentry & Csete, 1991; Ely, 1995).

On the other hand, the last version of the questionnaire included 23 statements related to the future trends.
Among all these statements, only for the one related to the being a leader in the educational changes is there a significant difference between the groups. Results indicate that practitioners are more suspicious than researcher about future the roles of the field in educational settings. The economic problems of the Country make graduates of the educational communication programs hard to find decent jobs. This situation might affect the responds of the participants, especially practitioners.

Participants also indicate that graduates of the programs will, same as today, have almost no chance to be employed in public organizations such as ministry of education, etc. The economy experts are expressing the misuse of human resources in the governmental and public organizations, and harmfulness of this situation on economy. We think that if the graduates of educational communications could find opportunities to work in these organizations, there might be a slight chance to solve this misusage. One of the emphasis areas of the field is human resources development and the graduates have skills and attitudes toward correct usage of human resources.

Another interesting finding is that participants do not agree on the increase in distance education. This result conflicts with the literature. We interpret this as that although Turkey has a long history, this technology (distance education) is not accepted and it is not extended, as it has to be.

The results about the use of textbooks in the future is also interesting and conflicting with the literature. The participants agree on that the textbooks will still be used widely in almost all instructional settings although literature indicates a gradual decrease in use of textbooks. We think that use of very old-fashioned instructional approaches in almost every grade of public education and misleading applications of technology integration strengthen the idea that textbooks are the unique and most reliable sources of knowledge and increased the fear of technology usage.

On the other hand, results related to the statements about different aspects of instructional design such as increase in applications of constructivist approach, providing more learner control, wide spread use of team learning show consistency with the literature. However, applications prove that although experts believe in the importance of these applications, they find difficult to apply them in their instructions in Turkey.

Same as instructional design items, participants agree on the statements related to educational media such as development of virtual learning environments, use of digital technologies, wide speared use of computer networks. There is an increase in intensity of using web and other computer related opportunities for instructional purposes. When these practices are observed, it can be identified that most of these efforts have no pedagogical background and because of this they fail to help people learn. However, there is a tendency to include more and modern pedagogical aspects into instructional practices in Turkey.

Conclusions and Further Investigations

We strongly believe that the most important result of this study is that it is hard to draw strict boundaries of the field of educational communications due to its peripatetic nature and continues influences of the other fields. However, we propose that these sorts of decision-making and/or future prediction studies should be conducted regularly to keep up the developments in the field because fuzzy or conflicting ideas about the varying aspects of educational communications might create serious problems. Updated studies, for sure, will not only provide help for practitioners and researchers but also make leadership easier.

Turkey definitely needs more of these sorts of studies to be able to establish a consensus on different aspects of the field including names, programs, definitions, trends, applications, issues, etc. The first step might be a professional organization that will have the mission of providing leadership in the field in Turkey. So that publications and meetings can be supported easily to provide good communication channels among the people in the field, standard programs can be offered to bring up new people into the field, and demonstrate effective, efficient, appealing examples of educational communication practices.

In order to increase the validity and reliability of these sorts of research findings, researchers should include as many experts dealing with different aspects of the field such as employers of educational communication graduates and foreign experts as possible. So that new ideas might come up and stronger agreements might be achieved. However, Delphi technique is a time consuming activity. Most of the time usually spends for mailing and analyzing the responses but new technological tools provide researchers numerous advantages. E-mail is one of these advantages. E-mail based a Delphi study will of course save time. Also using some content analysis tools with e-mail might provide researchers flexibility of using different type of questionnaires such as the ones includes open-ended items.

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